

Courtship

(Sermon Notes)

By Warren Zehrung 1/30/2016

The Church is the Fiancée of Christ. We, the Church brethren, are the Fiancée of Jesus Christ.

Let me define "Courtship." For the purpose of this Sermon, the courtship period, for the Church brethren, is the time in which the brethren demonstrate their compatibility and faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

I wanted to state it that way because in an ordinary courtship – the young man and the young lady are both equally on their P's and Q's approaching the wedding day. If we have not already been doing so, now is the time to "mind our manners", "mind our conduct," and "be on our best behavior."

In the case of Jesus Christ, His Godly character is perfect – and always will be. He does not need to demonstrate His compatibility and faithfulness to us – as He has long ago done that for the Church.

It is we, the Fiancée of Christ, who must be equal to the relationship that Jesus expects of us. Do we show forth the spiritual **attitude** and Godly attributes required in a bride meet for our Creator God? And yet our relationship with Christ at this time is a dynamic and energetic exchange of love, emotion, trust, sentiment and spiritual development.

Paul wrote to the early Church of God:

2Corinthians 11:2 For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have **espoused** [*'harmozo'* - betroth, engaged, wife-to-be, intended, affianced] you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

'Espoused' means we are engaged to be married to Jesus Christ. We are not yet the wife of Jesus Christ—that will take place when we are ready. But right now, we are the Fiancée of Christ – espoused, betrothed, engaged, wife-to-be, intended, affianced bride to be. As such, spiritually we must be as a chaste virgin to Christ.

"Jealous" is Greek '*zeloo*' / '*zelos*' – a warm zealousness of anticipation – an eagerness of passionate enthusiasm. It is language that would describe the beautiful love of a newly engaged young couple with eagerness and devotion for one another. Because of Paul's preaching of the Gospel, and teaching, the brethren have been brought into an espoused/engagement relationship with Jesus Christ. This is the status of our relationship with Jesus Christ at this point in time.

The Church is not yet married to Jesus – that will come at our resurrection – and then we will be the Bride of Christ. Jesus is going to enter into an eternal new covenant marriage relationship with spiritual Israel – the Church of God – which will never be broken. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah." (Hebrews 8:8, Jeremiah 31:31-32)

It should go without saying that Jesus is going to be extremely selective when taking His wife for ever more.

When we read the Psalms – let's not look at them as some dry history of ages past. These are God's prophetic words – for us – showing us the very mind-set of God Himself.

Psalm 45:7 Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the **oil of gladness** above thy fellows.

Oil of gladness – Brethren, we have been separated from the world and made to be the Fiancée of Christ – imbued with the 'oil of gladness' His Holy Spirit."

Psalm 45:8 All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad.

We are being made ready and prepared for the heavenly wedding to come.

Psalm 45:9 Kings' daughters were among thy honorable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir.

Psalm 45:10 Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house;

That is a new family relationship will be formed in marriage to the King, Jesus Christ. We are told to leave our father and his mother, and cleave unto one another: and they shall be one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)

Psalm 45:11 So shall the king greatly desire thy **beauty**: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him.

And, so in today's sermon I want to explore our present relationship with Jesus Christ. Are we – the brethren of the Church of God, the kind of people where – spiritually speaking – Jesus Christ the King greatly desires our beauty?

Spiritually speaking, are we that chaste virgin to Christ?

In praying, we pray to the Father. And as we conclude our prayer – we ask it on the authority of Jesus Christ. And that is as it should be. But to what extent – as the Fiancée of Christ is He in our thoughts and heart?

I'm not speaking of using the name, "Jesus" in a gratuitous way as the Protestants are wont to do – I am simply asking if our bridegroom - future husband is daily in our mind and actions.

When we were young and courting our spouse, we enhanced and augmented each and every date with a token of our love like flowers or candy. We spoke of the delicate things of affection with promises of "I'll always love you."

We do think of Jesus and what He did for us each Passover. The generosity and gifts from Jesus to us - are always staggering, but **what do we offer** in the courtship to show our continuing adoration and devotion to our future husband? Is it enough to say, "He knows how I feel?" I don't think so.

God compares our relationship in marriage with our spouse to the relationship between Christ and the Church. The very purpose of the institution of marriage between a man and a woman was to show us now – what God intends for us later.

Intuitively we know the importance of keeping love alive with our spouse – but could we be **letting down**, or worse yet, taking our relationship with Jesus Christ for granted?

"The Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." (Genesis 2:18)

In the Millennial Kingdom of God – it would not be right for Jesus to be there alone. God is preparing a "help meet for Him." And that is **us** brethren!

Mark 10:6 But from the **beginning** of the creation God made them male and female.

Mark 10:7 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife;

Ephesians 5:31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

Ephesians 5:32 This is a **great mystery**: but I speak concerning **Christ and the church**.

When comparing the unity of mind and heart within the marriage relationship to the bond of unity that exists between Christ and the Church brethren, the apostle Paul called it a **great mystery**. What is the significance of the wedding of Jesus Christ to the Church? Who is the Fiancée? Remarkably, it is revealed that not everyone will participate in the marriage supper. Blessed are they who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb! What can we do to ensure that we will be invited to take part in Christ's wedding?

Paul gives us a big head start on understanding what our **relationship** with Jesus Christ ought to be by explaining the similar rapport between a husband and wife.

Within God's Church, we are aware of the deep spiritual significance of a Godly marriage: First, with regard to God's plan to reproduce Himself and.., Secondly, as a figure and illustration of the Church brethren's intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, the Messiah. (Revelation 19:7-9).

When Paul wrote his epistles, there were a lot of troubled marriages in the Church. The Corinthians, especially, had a difficult time understanding what a Godly marriage should be. Paul wrote:

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives [not only with candy and roses, but], even as Christ also loved the Church, and **gave Himself** for it;

Even as Christ is the author of our salvation. Jesus took our guilt our blame our sins upon Himself as an innocent **substitutionary sacrifice**.

God created man for the purpose of obtaining everlasting life with Him. It is however a gift from God that is based on certain contingencies. All sin must be repented of—and taken away through God's forgiveness.

Sin is against God and His perfect moral code that brings peace to the entire universe. In no way do we somehow possess the "right" to tarnish or detract from the glory of God.

1John 3:4 Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

When we disrupt God's perfect balance by interjecting sin, disorder and disruption into God's perfect order—we become worthy of death (Romans 6:23). That is because as human beings we are totally unable to restore and repair the damage our sin has brought about. If we murder—we cannot restore life. Saying, "I'm sorry," will not and cannot reinstate a lost life.

Only the perfect life of Jesus Christ—**worth more** than the entire universe created by His hand—can forgive sin and restore life.

He willingly sacrificed His life and substituted His life so that we may be saved from the death we so deserve. It is only that life of Jesus Christ that is able to set us free of our death-debt and bestow salvation upon us sinners.

The question we must answer is, "What must be done that we might obtain this precious gift of everlasting life?" Through the tree of life, God was offering mankind the way to eternal life as members of the supreme divine Family of God. We see Christ's substitutionary sacrifice here:

Romans 4:24 But for us also, to whom [righteousness] shall be imputed, if we believe on Him [God the Father] who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;

Romans 4:25 Who was **delivered [to death] for our offences** [sins and transgressions], and was raised again for our justification.

Justification is acquittal, innocence, guilty past wiped out—just before God.

Jesus was dead – but God the Father raised Him in exceeding great power to Life – demonstrating His [God the Father's] acceptance of Christ's life payment [propitiation] in our stead – wiping out our past guilt.

1 John 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Jesus was an innocent victim. He loved us, and was willing to die for us. Our guilt our sins, were borne by Him, and Him alone and God forgives them when we repent and accept His sacrifice. That kind of Godly, Christian love does not come naturally for us. Do you know anyone who has died serving his wife? Paul is comparing Jesus' dying for the Church brethren to the role of Husband and Wife.

Ephesians 5:26 That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, [that's salvation]

What must a man do to be worthy of a glorious wife – a Holy Woman who pursues perfection?

Ephesians 5:27 That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

In the same way Jesus brings the Church to perfection, a husband's responsibility is to aid his wife in achieving the highest standing in God's Kingdom that is attainable.

Ephesians 5:28 So ought men [this is the way] to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loves his wife loves himself.

The Godly sacrifices the husband makes for the wife's sake – serves to bring her to perfection. In fact the Scriptures are clear... The greater responsibility – is on the Man! Just as Jesus is the head of the Church. The man is the leader, the protector and the provider – it is the man's duty to do all to develop the marriage relationship.

Jesus Christ will not diminish the glory or strength of His wife, the Church, He supports us, and in so doing, He creates a strong family unit that is a tribute to God's design for marriage. Jesus Christ **died** for the Church brethren to be able to have salvation – and husbands are to love their wives equally – Actually making every sacrifice called for – to bring our mate into that mature – developed – close relationship with God.

A good marriage is a beautiful thing – a Godly thing – with deep and transcendent meaning for the entire Church of God. That is why it is so important to continuously build on our marriages all of our lives.

Sometimes men in God's Church consider themselves **too highly** – and subsequently treat their wives with less respect. Those wives do not become spiritually **developed** – and the man does not become all he could be. Both are denied the right relationship with Jesus Christ that He desires.

As we saw in Psalms – God sees the **spiritual beauty** in our wives. Can we be so blind as not to see it? When Jesus looks at the men in God's Church does He see boasting, self-admiration, and self-importance? Does He find dominance and control – always being in the driver's seat rather than Husbands truly being the servant of God's servants? That dominance and control - that is the pattern of the world – not God's Church brethren.

“Lowly in Heart” is a humble and poor and contrite heart that has been emptied and remorseful in order to be able to receive the attributes of God's Spirit.

When we are all filled up with who we are – there is no room for God's heart. With a “Lowly Heart” we have been emptied – making room for true Spiritual growth. We gladly are able to have Christ's heart become our heart.

Hebrews 10:22 Let us draw near with a **true heart** in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

...That we may be presented as a chaste virgin to Christ. Have we forgotten just how much cleaning up that took – just to begin the process of our conversion?

A good marriage is a close, unified relationship between a man and a woman. It was God who instituted the marriage covenant between a man and a woman. God brought about the marriage covenant for a vitally important reason.

From Genesis to Revelation, God uses the intimacy and love between a man and his wife to reflect the deeply spiritual relationship between Jesus Christ and the Church.

*What do I bring to the relationship with Jesus?

And let's not forget the in-laws! I say that tongue and cheek, because our reconciled relationship with God the Father is the **key** to a right relationship with Jesus.

Though the world prefers to believe that Jesus accepts us in our current condition –“just as you are”– it is obvious from the Scriptures that His wife will be arrayed in the purest white wedding gown – symbolizing her perfect and pure love for Him, her spotless spiritual condition, and her eternal faithfulness in marriage.

Are we absolutely certain that we meet that criteria – in other words, are we using our engagement period to grow as close to Jesus Christ as we possibly can?

Anyone who assumes that they have attained to the perfect measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, underestimates the supreme **perfection** of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:13).

In the same way that a man is **not complete** without a wife, mankind without God's Holy Spirit is incomplete.

God intended that mankind have His Spirit from the very beginning. He made it available when He presented the Tree of Life to Adam and Eve.

Genesis 2:9 And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the **tree of life** also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

The Tree of Life **represented** God's Holy Spirit. This is the way it was from the beginning. Adam and Eve were to have a Godly marriage. God's Holy Spirit was available to make that possible.

But Adam and Eve sinned and their marriage was never what it should have been. Only with God's Holy Spirit can we achieve a Godly relationship with Jesus Christ.

Ancient Israel was Jesus' Wife. You can read about the Marriage covenant between Israel and Jesus starting in Genesis 24.

Understand this: We today are Spiritual Israel. You and I, we are the Fiancée of Jesus Christ.

Keep in mind that when Ezekiel writes – Israel had long since been carried away into Assyrian Captivity. Ezekiel, himself, had been carried away captive by Babylon. Israel and Jerusalem had sinned terribly and God had brought His punishment on them for idolatry and Sabbath breaking. But God had a message for Israel that we **only now** receive through the Bible.

Ezekiel 16:2 Son of man, **cause** Jerusalem to know her abominations,

Let's read these verses and recognize that they apply equally to us – because **we are the Israel of God** (Galatians 6:16). We today – in God's Church – are the **spiritual** Israel of God.

Ezekiel 16:3 And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto Jerusalem; Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite.

Israel did not look like she had the potential. The point is: It was the same with us when we were called out of the world – we were hopeless sinners.

Romans 5:8 But God commended His love toward us, in that, while we were **yet sinners**, Christ died for us.

Jerusalem is in the land of Canaan – the Promised Land – and much of the immoral flavor of Amorites and Hittites had rubbed off on Israel. Israel's pedigree is not special - not wealth, not Power, not numbers, but least among nations.

Today, God's Church makes the same mistake of thinking that we are **so very special** – when in fact way too much of this evil world is rubbing off onto us. We are too much a product of society around us.

Ezekiel 16:4 And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all.

Down in Egypt – Israel had no one to care for her. In Birth, Israel was abandoned and neglected - not loved or special to anyone.

Ezekiel 16:5 None eye **pitied** thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born.

No nation came to their rescue. No one cared – Israel was cast aside – loathed and despised. The nation of Israel was born in Egypt and no one had regard for them as a people. They were a despised people and if God had not delivered them – they would have perished in Egypt. God had compassion and pity – God had mercy and even extended His love.

Ezekiel 16:6 And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted [thrashing about] in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, **Live**; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, **Live**.

Live! Because they were destined to die - aborted at birth, when God came along. Notice how God says that He developed Israel – now grown into millions and millions of people; He developed Israel into a beautiful mature woman – prepared to be a bride.

Ezekiel 16:7 I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxen great, and thou art come to excellent **beauty**: thy breasts are fashioned, and thine hair is grown long, whereas thou wast naked and bare.

God increased Israel. They became a nation of renown. We did not get where we are by our own strength.

"For thy Maker is thy Husband; the Lord of hosts is His name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel." (Isaiah 54:5)

There is a prophetic picture in Ezekiel 16, where Jesus washed, dressed, and blessed the nation of Israel so that she would be prepared to be His wife. He cleansed her; He groomed and dressed her in royal garments – He prepared her.

That picture will be completed when Jesus takes the Church – spiritual Israel – to be His Bride (Galatians 6:16). Look at the detailed attention Jesus gave to His fiancée. We were certainly Polluted at first. God loved us first while we were yet sinners. But, God **knows** our potential. God covered us and took away our sins.

Ezekiel 16:8 When I passed by you, and looked upon you, behold, your time was the time of love; and I spread my garment over you,[a symbolic proposal of **marriage**] and covered your nakedness (Ruth 3:9): yea, I swore unto you, and entered into a **covenant** with you (Exodus 24), saith the Lord God, and you became mine.

Ezekiel 16:9 Then washed I thee with water (Exodus 19:10); yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I **anointed** thee with **oil**.

The narrative jumps to the New Testament – the perfect picture of being covered by the blood of Christ and the coming of God's **Holy Spirit**. It did **not** happen in the Old Testament.

This Points to the potential of Godly marriages in the Church. Jesus is preparing the Church to be His Bride. Jesus Christ is the one who cleaned old Israel to be gorgeous, **married**, covered, dressed and adorned - > shoes, jewelry clothes - > so that His fiancée could rise to the occasion. Be clothed with righteousness and Godly character.

Ezekiel 16:10 I clothed you also with needlepoint work, and placed fur-lined slippers on your feet, and I dressed you about with fine linen, and I covered you with silk.

Jesus does that – we did not do it for ourselves. The Church of God is being attacked on every side terribly!

Ezekiel 16:11 I embellished you also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon your hands, and a necklace on your neck.

God makes a Godly relationship possible.

Ezekiel 16:12 And I put jewelry on you, and earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown upon your head.

We are to be a light unto all - an example to all people - with God's help. Jesus brought about the beauty. We must flight the temptation to say, "I've done it all right." Be careful not to ever trust in our own righteousness.

Ezekiel 16:13 Thus were you adorned with gold and silver; and your garments were of fine linen, and silk, and embroidered work; you ate of **fine flour** [Word of God - the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1Corinthians 5:8)], and honey, and oil [Holy Spirit]: and you were exceeding beautiful, and you did prosper into a kingdom.

Silk and Feasting, Food for the Feast. We are spiritually beautiful because Jesus made us beautiful. It is His intention that we prosper into the Kingdom of God.

Israel rejected God and sinned in every way with substitute religion and idolatry.

Prophetic Scriptures bring to light the splendor of the ultimate nuptial ceremony that Jesus Christ has prepared for us.

Brethren, we do not wish to miss out on the most splendid wedding of all time.

What an incredible truth that our Lord and Master has chosen to make us His Fiancée – even now - by entering into an eternal covenant with us.

Mere words fail to portray the most glorious ceremony ever to be, which Christ has reserved for His Fiancée alone.

Divine music will reverberate across the heavens, and gleaming, brilliance will illuminate the throne room, as the Fiancée is presented to her Lord to become His Bride.

She will be accepted by Him, adorned in her radiant white silk wedding gown – and upon her head she will wear a beautiful sparkling **crown**. We are warned:

Revelation 3:11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that **no man take thy crown**.

Ezekiel 16:14 And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through my **comeliness** [Christ's dignity], which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord GOD. [Jesus brought about the beauty.]

Jesus' own righteousness is imputed to us – that is the beauty.

But ancient Israel turned from God to false gods. Apply these verses to God's Church.

Ezekiel 16:15 But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and playedst the harlot because of thy renown, and pouredst out thy fornications on every one that passed by; his it was.

Ezekiel 16:16 And of thy garments thou didst take, and deckedst thy high places with divers colors, and played the harlot thereupon: the like things shall not come, neither shall it be so.

Made the Church of God a [House of ill-repute] with filthy Idolatry - misusing God's gifts – illegitimacy.

Ezekiel 16:17 Thou hast also taken thy fair jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given thee, and made to thyself images of men, and didst commit whoredom with them,

Read on here in Ezekiel 16 and see God's view of how the Church brethren, the **fiancée of Jesus**, are not prepared to meet Jesus when He comes.

Ezekiel 16:18 And tookest thy broidered garments, and coveredst them: and thou hast set mine oil and mine incense before them.

Ezekiel 16:19 My meat also which I gave thee, fine flour, and oil, and honey, wherewith I fed thee, thou hast even set it before them for a sweet savour: and thus it was, saith the Lord God.

Ezekiel 16:20 Moreover thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured. Is this of thy whoredoms a small matter,

Ezekiel 16:21 That thou hast slain my children, and delivered them to cause them to pass **through the fire** for them?

We lost and are losing tens of thousands of our young Church of God children to the world.

Modern Israel accepts abortion - sacrificed to Molech - remember from whence we come. Marriages require a lot of work. Satan brings failure. God made the marriage - we must build on it.

Ezekiel 16:22 And in all thine abominations and thy whoredoms thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth, when thou wast naked and bare, and wast polluted in thy blood.

Brethren, do we remember who we were? - what we were? when we were call by God, **cleaned** by the blood of Christ and placed in the Church?

God is making the marriage – He is putting us in the Church.

We did not save ourselves, we did not build the Church, we did not earn God’s Spirit and yet He has made us a part of the **New marriage covenant**. He did it all!

Think of Christ doing the same for us – only in the most splendid way – making us lovely and beautiful, spiritually!

The Bride of Christ will be adorned in fine linen, clean and white – meaning that she will be a perfect, spiritual Bride – with the righteousness of Christ upon her.

Jesus has done His part in completely washing His Bride. We must be washed. “Jesus Christ... loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood.” (Revelation 1:5)

The Fiancée of Christ will be adorned, not so much in the elegant physical garments of a dazzling wedding gown, but in the brilliant **spiritual** attributes of Godly love, obedience, holiness, perfection, righteousness, and **brotherly love**.

1 John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we **love the brethren**.

The Fiancée will not be of superficial character, but will have developed Godly moral fiber – making her suitably prepared for her wedding to Christ.

Let us ask ourselves this question: Are we doing our part to be the perfect Bride Jesus is seeking? What are we doing to keep the Courtship alive and vibrant?

Notice what Jesus has to say concerning His Fiancée: “It shall be in that day, says the Lord, that you shalt call Me Ishi [my husband]...“I will betroth you unto Me forever.

Yes, I will betroth you unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and in mercies. I will even **betroth** thee unto Me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord.” (Hosea 2:16, 19-20)

The marriage of Jesus Christ to His Fiancée will inaugurate the eternal covenant planned from the foundation of the world.

“To her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” (Revelation 19:8)

Jesus is doing His part in the Courtship. What degree of reciprocation must we - the Church brethren achieve to be doing our part in the courtship?

End: Courtship